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# WALKER PLEA DEAL IS NOW UNCERTAIN

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 20 — Senior military officers fear that John A. Walker Jr. is so deceptive that they will never be able to measure the damage caused by the Soviet spy ring he headed, according to Reagan Administration officials and others familiar with the case.

Tests by polygraph, or lie detector, the sources said, showed that Mr. Walker, a retired Navy warrant officer, was deceptive about a much broader range of topics than was disclosed publicly in the last two weeks.

Justice Department officials said they remained undecided about whether to honor the Government's plea bargain with Mr. Walker and his son, Michael, another Navy veteran.

Those who are knowledgeable about the case said Jerry A. Whitworth, a former Navy communications officer convicted for his part in the operation, underwent a series of polygraph examinations and interrogations in recent days.

One Federal law-enforcement official said he expected that Mr. Whitworth's statements would be checked against the disputed accounts provided by Mr. Walker, whose Soviet espionage ring has been described as the most damaging in recent decades. Another source said Mr. Whitworth had been found to be largely truthful.

## Sentencing Was Delayed

At the request of prosecutors, a Federal judge has delayed sentencing of Mr. Walker and his son until Oct. 3. Federal officials said the Justice Department may soon ask another delay.

The deceptions that emerged in the polygraph tests of Mr. Walker, the sources said, posed questions of whether the military would ever know the damage caused by the ring, which supplied the Soviet Union with some of the Navy's most precious communications secrets.

They said Mr. Walker, possibly to protect himself and others in the spy ring, might have withheld valuable information about Navy projects that had been compromised.

"I understand he's flunking on literally everything," one source said of the polygraph results. In trying to assess the damage, the source said, "I was told we may be worse off now than we were at the beginning" of the case.

## Pentagon Is Against Bargain

Mr. Walker's chief defense lawyer, Fred Warren Bennett, said in an interview that understood from what law-enforcement officials had said that his client had not been found so broadly deceptive. "There's no reason for him to be less than 100 percent candid at this point," he said.

The Defense Department has indicated that it will urge prosecutors to abandon the plea bargain unless John Walker is completely truthful. The Justice Department said earlier this month that John Walker was found deceptive in two specific areas: the scope of the operation and the involvement of his brother, Arthur, a retired Navy lieutenant commander who was also convicted in the case.

## Anxiety as a Block to Test

Mr. Bennett said John Walker might have had troubles with the polygraph examinations, which measures blood pressure and other bodily responses, because of his anxiety over his possible sentence. "He's had tremendous pressure in regards to these polygraphs," Mr. Bennett said, noting that many prominent scientists and lawyers have no confidence in the accuracy of the devices. "I just don't place a lot of stock in these polygraphs. I've had clients who've passed them who have been guilty."

The plea bargain called for John Walker to be sentenced to life in prison; Michael Walker would be sentenced to 25 years. They could be freed on parole years earlier, however, and the plea agreement might hasten their freedom.

Mr. Whitworth, recently sentenced to 365 years in prison, agreed to submit to extensive polygraph examinations after his trial. Sources close to the case said the examinations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation began recently in California and centered on the amount of damage caused by the spy ring. Mr. Whitworth was convicted in San Francisco in July of passing highly classified coding information to the Soviet Union through his friend, Mr. Walker.

By determining what information was given to Soviet agents, Navy officials say, they hope to counteract whatever damage Mr. Whitworth's disclosures did.

## Legal Grounds Questioned

In a recent court statement, the director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Adm. William O. Studeman, said the spy ring had caused "unprecedented damage to the Navy and the nation" by enabling Soviet agents to read secret American military communications for years.

Justice Department officials have said John Walker's polygraph results would not be sufficient legal grounds to ask a Federal judge to overturn the agreement. "We'd have to have something more, and we don't have it now," an official said.

Despite that, the sources said, Navy officials are pushing prosecutors to reconsider the plea bargain, which has led to angry statements on both sides. The Navy Secretary, John F. Lehman Jr., initially opposed the agreement, saying it was too lenient.

The plea agreement was meant to permit the Government to prosecute the Walkers if John Walker "should knowingly withhold evidence from the Government or otherwise not be completely truthful with the Government."